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A Rose by Another Name

Confederate rose is an attention grabbing fall bloomer. It goes by several other names including cotton rose. Botanists know it as *Hibiscus mutabilis*.

This plant is found mostly in older gardens and landscapes across the deep south. Depending upon how much it freezes back each winter, it makes a shrub or small tree up to 15 feet tall. When temperatures reach 15 degrees F. it usually dies to the ground, but quickly sprouts back from the crown the following spring.

The vegetative growth of confederate rose during the spring and summer is not particularly striking. It grows in an informal shape and the leaves look a little like the standard hibiscus, but more like cotton or okra, to which it is also closely related.

The showy flowers appear in late summer and continue into the fall. There are several forms of confederate roses growing in southern landscapes. The cultivar known as 'Rubus' has deep pink flowers. 'Plena' has double white flowers that change to pink or red on the second day. The older, original types have double flowers that open white in the morning and gradually turn pink in the afternoon. Flowers are large, with blossoms that are up to 6 inches across being common.

A friend uses the confederate rose's habit of changing flower color as a practical joke. He clips newly opened white blossoms and takes them to area offices, offering them as gifts. Each recipient is told that if a person possesses a high moral character, the flower will remain white. If not, it might change color. The next day of course, that person is greeted by a red or pink blossom.

Some confederate rose growing tips:

- Although common in southern gardens, this plant is not often found in nurseries and garden centers.
- Propagation is easy. Start new plants from seed in the spring, or root 8 inch long terminal cuttings during spring, summer and early fall. Cuttings can be rooted in a

conventional propagation bed, or even in a glass of water.

- Confederate roses are not particular about soil type, thriving under a wide range of moisture conditions once established.

- This plant species requires bright light in order to perform best. Choose a planting site that receives at least 6 hours of direct sunlight during the growing season.

- Locate plants in warmer areas of the landscape in order to limit the amount of damage to stems and branches during the winter. Choose planting sites that are protected on the north side by the house, outbuildings or solid fences.

- Heavy mulches of leaves, bark or pine needles applied during the fall help to protect roots and the plant crown, as well as helping to ensure that complete recovery will occur the following spring.

- A light fertilization during the spring and midsummer would be beneficial where soils are extremely sandy. Avoid applying excessive amounts. Most confederate roses perform well with little fertilizer being applied.

Question of the Week: A vigorous vine continues to come up in my shrub beds. When I dig at the base I find a large potato-like structure. What is this, and how can I get rid of it!

Answer: No vine other than Smilax fits your description. It is an aggressive weed when found in shrub plantings. Ten species of Smilax have been identified, having such common names as greenbrier, catbrier, bamboo vine, bull brier, horsebrier, jackson-brier and, for obvious reasons: blaspheme vine.

Smilax species vary in leaf shape and in other characteristics. Leaves may be heart shaped, ovate, lanceolate or truncate.

All species form very large, tough rhizomes as the plant matures. These underground structures serve to store large amounts of food reserves and make chemical control extremely difficult.

There is no herbicide that I can recommend for control that would be safe on your ornamental plants. Hand digging, though labor intensive, is your best option.